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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 IO-10 SCCT-01 A-01 OPR-02 SY-05

SCS-03 SCA-01 OC-05 CCO-00 /094 W
---------- 056049
O 241155Z MAY 75
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4481
DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
USINT BAGHDAD UNN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 6652

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, LE, PLO
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN LEBANON - SITREP AS OF NOON MAY 24

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REF: BEIRUT 6611

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1. BEIRUT HOSTILITIES DESCRIBED REFTEL HAVE SLACKENED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT LAST EVENING OF FORMATION OF NEW MILITARY GOVT HEADED BY AGED, RETIRED INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES GENERAL NUREDDIN RIFAI (FBIS JN221930Y). CITY IS LARGELY QUIET, ALTHOUGH SCATTERED SMALL ARMS SNIPING FIRE AND INTERMITTENT EXPLOSIONS ARE STILL AUDIBLE IN CERTAIN AREAS THAT SAW HEAVIER FIGHTING DURING PAST FOUR DAYS. ANOTHER CEASEFIRE, THIS TIME REPORTEDLY ARRANGED BY STRENOUS EFFORTS OF ARAB AMBASSADORS IN BEIRUT, WENT INTO EFFECT AT 2100 HOURS LOCAL MAY 23 (SHORTLY BEFORE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW GOVT'S FORMATION). WHILE LATEST CEASEFIRE PROVIDED FOR JOINT FEDAYEEN-LEBANESE ARMY AND POLICE PATROLS TO CIRCULATE IN AFFECTED AREAS TO SUPERVISE ITS OBSERVANCE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SUCH PATROLS ARE SO FAR EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN GAINING ACCESS TO THOSE AREAS DUE TO NON-COOPERATION FROM BOTH PHALANGIST AND FEDAYEEN COMBATANTS. DESPITE THIS, A LULL IN THE SHOOTING IS DEFINITELY IN PROGRESS, AND GOL'S NEW VICE PREMIER (ARMY G-3 BRIG. MUSA KANAAN) HAS TOLD EMBOFF HE IS HOPEFUL IT WILL CONTINUE LONG ENOUGH TO ALLOW PASSIONS ON BOTH SIDES TO SUBSIDE AND PERMIT EXTREMIST ELEMENTS TO BE BROUGHT UNDER MORE EFFECTIVE CONTROL. ALTHOUGH TENSION REMAINS HIGH, BEIRUT RESIDENTS APPEAR TO BE CIRCULATING MORE OPENLY IN SOME OTHER PARTS OF THEY CITY (ESPECIALLY RAS BEIRUT AREA WHERE BULK OF FOREIGN COMMUNITY RESIDES), AND TRAFFIC IN THOSE AREAS IS HEAVIER THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR SEVERAL DAYS (ALTHOUGH STILL NOT AS THICK AS USUAL BY ANY MEANS). AIRPORT CONTINUES TO FUNCTION NORMALLY, AND ALL AMERICANS--AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE--ARE SAFE.

2. FORMATION OF NEW MILITARY GOVT, WHICH CAUGHT US AND PRACTICALLY EVERYONE ELSE IN LEBANON COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE, HAS BEEN GREETED WITH ENTHUSIASM ONLY BY PHALANGISTS AND CHAMOUNIST LEADERS. SUNNI POLITICAL LEADERS, INCLUDING "TRADITIONALIST" FIGURES RASHID
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KARAME AND SAEB SALAM, HAVE REACTED VERY NEGATIVELY--DENOUNCING PRES FRANGIE'S MOVE AS VIOLATION OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND DEROGATION OF MOSLEM "RIGHTS". (KARAME'S BITTER REACTION IS UNDERSTANDABLE, SINCE FRANGIE APPEARS TO HAVE LED HIM TO BELIEVE HE WAS IN LINE FOR PREMIERSHIP RIGHT UP UNTIL TIME NEW MILITARY GOVT WAS ANNOUNCED.) IN ANY CASE, SEEMS CLEAR THAT MOST OF LEBANON'S "TRADITIONAL" POLITICIANS--

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CHRISTIAN AS WELL AS MOSLEM-- WERE EXCLUDED FROM
CONSULTATIONS WHICH LED TO FORMATION OF NEW GOVT.)
AS ANOTHER INDICATION OF INTENSE SUNNI DISSATISFACTION,
ARMED MEN IN CONSIDERABLE NUMBERS CAN NOW BE OBSERVED
IN STREETS OF BEIRUT'S MAIN SUNNI QUARTERS (E.G.,
BASTA, BURJ ABU HAIDAR, ETC.). SUNNI LEADERS--
INCLUDING GRAND MUFTI--ARE HOLDING CONTINUOUS MEETINGS
TODAY TO DECIDE HOW TO DISLAY THEIR VEHEMENTOPPOSITION
TO NEW GOVT, AND THEY ARE BEING JOINED IN THEIR
CONSULTATIONS BY DRUZE "SOCIALIST" LEADER KAMAL
JUMBLATT AND MARONITE MAVERICK POLITICIAN RAYMOND
EDDE. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NEXT DAY OR TWO WILL WITNESS
CONCERTED SUNNI MOSLEM EFFORT, IN CONJUNCTION WITH
LEFTIST, PRO-FEDAYEEN GROUPS, TO WITHHOLD COOPERATION
FROM NEW GOVT AND ACTIVELY SEEK ITS DOWNFALL. ONE
LARGE QUESTION MARK IN THIS CONNECTION IS ATTITUDE
OF INFLUENTIAL SHIITE LEADER IMMAM MUSA SADR, WHO HAS
SO FAR MADE NO COMMENT RE NEW GOVT OR GIVN ANY
INDICATION OF HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD IT.

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SCS-03 SCA-01 OC-05 CCO-00 /094 W
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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4482
DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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AMEMBASSY ANKYWA
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USINT BAGHDAD UNN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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3. ADVERSE LEFTIST REACTION IS, IF ANYTHING, MORE VEHEMENT THAN THAT OF SUNNIS. JUMBLATT AND OTHER LEFTIST NOTABLES (INCLUDING COMMUNISTS AND BAATHISTS, AS WELL AS FEDAYEEN REPS) MET THROUGHOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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LAST NIGHT AND THIS MORNING TO ASSESS THE NEW SITUATION. AT NOON MAY 24, THEY ISSUED CALL FOR IMMEDIATE OPEN-ENDED, NATION-WIDE STRIKE IN PROTEST AGAINST NEW GOVT AND ARE OBVIOUSLY INTENT ON OPPOSING GOL BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS. STRIKE SEEMS TO HAVE ALREADY RESULTED IN DISTURBANCES PLUS COMPLETE SHUT-DOWN OF NORMAL LIFE IN TRIPOLI AND SIDON, BUT HAS ONLY BEEN PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE SO FAR IN BEIRUT (WHERE IT BEING OBSERVED PRIMARILY IN MOSLEM QUARTERS NOTED ABOVE).

4. PALESTINIANS ALSO ARE GIVING CLEAR INDICATIONS OF BEING UNHAPPY OVER FORMATION OF MILITARY GOVT, ALTHOUGH--STILL INVOLVED IN INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS AMONG THEMSELVES AND WITH LEFTIST AND SUNNI LEADERSHIP--PLO AND ITS CONSTITUENT GROUPS HAVE AS YET ISSUED NO AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF THEIR ATTITUDE. WE NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT TODAY'S SEMI-OFFICIAL SYRIAN DAILY, ATH THAWRAH, HAS CATEGORICALLY DENOUNCED NEW LEBANESE GOVT AS "THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OF SYRIA", WARNING THAT "WHAT THE AMERICANS FAILED TO ACHIEVE IN 1958, THEY WILL NOT MANAGE TO ACHIEVE NOW BY MEANS OF NUREDDIN RIFAI AND A FEW OFFICERS." GIVEN WHAT WE KNOW TO BE 'ARAFAT'S INCREASINGLY STRONG RELIANCE ON SYRIAN SUPPORT THROUGHOUT PAST WEEK'S PHALANGIST-FEDAYEEN FIGHTING, IT IS PROBABLE THAT PLO--NOT TO MENTION MORE EXTREME FEDAYEEN LEADERS-- WILL HEW CLOSELY TO THIS LINE IN THEIR FUTURE DEALINGS WITH

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GOL. (SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT 'ARAFAT HAS QUICKLY ACCEPTED SARG'S RECENT INVITATION TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION TALKS IN DAMASCUS RE FORMATION OF JOINT SYRIAN-PLO MILITARY COMMAND, SUGGESTING THAT PLO DELEGATION HEADED BY KHALAD FAHOUM BEGIN SUCH TALKS AS EARLY AS SUNDAY, MAY 25.) WE THUS FAR HAVE SEEN NO REACTIONS FROM ANY OTHER ARAB CAPITAL TO LEBANON'S NEW GOVT, ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND 'ARAFAT HAS ALREADY SENT MESSAGES OF COMPALINT TO SADAT AND QADHAFI, AS WELL AS TO ASSAD.

5. COMMENT: AS NOTED ABOVE, GOL'S PLAN TO
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DEAL WITH SUNNI-LEFTIST-PALESTINIAN-SYRIAN OPPOSITION APPEARS TO BE BASED ON HOPE THAT INTENSE EMOTIONS AND SUSPICIONS ENGENDERED BY ITS FORMATION WILL GRADUALLY SUBSIDE, AND THAT CURRENT LULL IN LOCAL HOSTILITIES WILL CONTINUE LONG ENOUGHT FOR THIS TO HAPPEN. VICE PREMIER KANAAN IS HOLDING PRESS CONFERENCE AT THIS MOMENT, DURING WHICH HE WILL STRIVE TO SOOTHE LOCAL PASSIONS AND REASSURE PALESTINIANS, SYRIA AND OTHER ARAB STATES THAT GOL REMAINS LOYAL TO ARAB CAUSE IN GENERAL AND PALESTINIAN CAUSE IN PARTICULAR. (WE JUST LEARNED THAT HE STRESSED (A) NEW GOVT IS "PROVISIONAL" AND NOT "MILITARY" IN STRICT SENSE, (B) THAT ITS SOLE OBJECTIVE IS TO RESTORE "NATURAL CONDITIONS" WITHIN LEBANON, AND (C) THAT GOL'S POSITION RE RESPECT FOR AND ADHERENCE TO CAIRO AND MELKHART "AGREEMENTS" WITH FEDAYEEN HAS NOT RPT NOT CHANGED.) GIVEN THIS ATTITUDE, AND IN VIEW OF GOL'S CONCERN TO AVOID GREATER SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS, WE EXPECT NEW GOVT AND ITS ARMY MEMBERS WILL BE EXTREMELY ANXIOUS TO AVOID GREATER ARMY PHYSICAL INTERVENTION BETWEEN PHALANGISTS AND FEDAYEEN THAN EXISTS AT PRESENT. IN ADDITION, NEW GOL HAS SO FAR SHOWN NO SIGN OF INTENT TO IMPOSE CURFEW, CENSORSHIP OR OTHER CUSTOMARY ASPECTS OF MILITARY RULE. REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF SUCH RESTRAINT, ACCOMPANIED BY HOPE THAT TENSIONS AROUSED BY RECENT HOSTILITIES AND LAST NIGHT'S DEVELOPMENTS WILL GRADUAYLLY SUBSIDE, WILL REALLY WORK. NO ONE HERE CAN NOW FORETELL WHAT DIRECTION EVENTS WILL TAKE OVER NEXT FEW DAYS, EXCEPT TO SAY THAT NEW LEBANESE GOVT WILL BE WALING TIGHTROPE OVER ABYSS OF ACUTEST CONFESSIONAL-POLITICAL STRIFE THIS COUNTRY HAS EVER SEEN.

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6. IN ADDITION TO STRIKE (PARA 3 ABOVE) WE UNDERSTAND
TRIPOLI AND SIDON EXPERIENCING DEMONSTRATIONS AND ARMED
DISTURBANCES. ELSEWHERE
COUNTRY APPEARS RELATIVELY CALM.

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7. TOURISTS, CASUAL BUSINESSMEN, ETC. SHOULD
STILL AVOID BEIRUT. THOUGH HEAVY FIGHTING HAS
SUBSIDED BEIRUT IS STILL AN ARMED CITY AND ANY
SMALL INCIDENT COULD SET OFF FIRE FIGHTS
THROUGHOUT THE AREA.
GODLEY

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